

**Subcommittee on Africa, Global Human Rights and International
Operations**

Prepared Statement of Rep. Christopher H. Smith, Chairman

The World Hunger Crisis

May 25, 2006

I am pleased to convene this hearing of the Subcommittee on Africa, Global Human Rights and International Operations. The Subcommittee today is examining the enormous need for food aid around the world, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa which has the greatest need. As an essential element for life, the assurance of food availability must necessarily be a focal point of our humanitarian assistance programs and at the forefront of our interventions on behalf of those in the greatest need. While the extent of that need can at times be overwhelming, we must keep in mind the verses of Matthew 25, “as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me,” and “as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.”

Last August, I, along with Greg Simpkins of the Africa Subcommittee staff, visited Kalma and Mukjar refugee camps in South and West Darfur. We saw first hand how food aid was making the difference between life and death for the thousands of people in the camps. We spoke with many people whose lives had been utterly devastated by the ravages of war, but who were keeping hope alive thanks to the gifts of international humanitarian aid and food aid.

However, our visit to these camps raised a question that I hope will be answered in today’s hearing. What is the Government of Sudan, as well as other developing country governments, going to do about contributing to the elimination of hunger by opening their own stocks of food or by facilitating, rather than hampering, the delivery of food to hungry people in their countries? In Sudan, the government has not only failed to contribute to the feeding of its own people, but has actually interfered with the supply of food to those in need in the Darfur camps like the ones we visited. Moreover, the Government of Sudan placed a commercial embargo on Kalma camp while we were there that prevented the sale of food and other necessary items to those able to buy them in the camps. We in the developed world should help feed those in need, but it also the responsibility of the governments in question to respond to the needs of their own people.

The UN World Food Program has announced that almost 731,000 metric tons of food will be needed this year to feed the 6.1 million people caught in the conflict in Southern Sudan and Darfur. Over 89,000 metric tons is needed Eastern Chad for Sudanese refugees, Chadian nationals adversely affected by the influx of refugees, and a contingency reserve of six months for the refugees. An estimated 6.25 million people in the Horn of Africa face a severe humanitarian crisis this year resulting primarily from successive seasons of failed rains in that region. The World Food Program has sent out appeals for approximately 1.6 million metric tons of food aid for the Horn of Africa and

the rest of the sub-Saharan.

This does not include, of course, the emergency food needs of peoples in other parts of the world, including Haiti, North Korea, Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Indonesia.

It is important to keep in mind that behind these mind-boggling numbers are real men, women and children, people like you and me, individuals who are suffering not only the present pangs of hunger but who will have to live with the long-term effects of mal- and under-nutrition. There are also those for whom the lack of food exacerbates the cruel effects of HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases, thereby increasing the likelihood of death. This is the reason why it is so important for us to examine the crisis of world hunger, and to continue to direct our efforts to address it.

I am proud to say that we Americans continue our long tradition of compassion and generosity in responding to these needs. The United States is the primary donor of food aid in the world and the leading donor of food aid to Sudan and Chad. The US Government has contributed a total of \$282.2 million worth of food aid thus far in FY2006 to Darfur and the Sudanese refugees in Chad through the World Food Program and the International Committee of the Red Cross. This follows contributions totaling \$324.5 million to the same two organizations in FY2005 for Sudan and Chad, in addition to 200,000 tons of wheat from the Bill Emerson Humanitarian Trust for Darfur.

The United States is also addressing the nutritional needs of particularly vulnerable populations. The President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief maximizes leverage with other donors including the USAID, the USDA and the World Food Program (with US financial support) to address the needs of HIV-affected communities, both in terms of providing direct food assistance and in addressing the underlying causes of food insecurity.

We look forward to hearing from our distinguished witnesses today about the hunger crises in our world, what is being done to respond, and recommendations as to how we can respond better. But we will also consider the contribution that U.S. food aid makes to longer-term, non-emergency development goals and the corresponding impact that this food aid has on individual lives. The most recent data available indicates that over 4 million children in 26 countries participated in the McGovern-Dole International Food for Education and Child Nutrition program in fiscal years 2003 and 2004. This program has resulted in higher school enrollment and improved access to education, especially for girls.

It is also reported by teachers and program administrators that the FFE program has increased local communities' concern for and participation in their children's education. There is a general improvement in academic performance as children are better able to concentrate after receiving a nutritious school lunch. Both families and the school community benefit from training on food preparation, health and hygiene. In this regard, we will have the benefit of hearing today from Mr. Gabriel Laizer, who now works on international development issues for the Alliance to End Hunger and who

started his career as a beneficiary of a feeding program in his primary school in Arusha, Tanzania.

My good friend Tony Hall, a former Member of Congress who just recently left his position as the U.S. Ambassador to the UN Agencies for Food and Agriculture, will also be testifying. He has published a book recently entitled, “Changing the Face of Hunger,” which I highly recommend, and which recounts many stories from Ambassador Hall’s years of confronting hunger, poverty and oppression throughout the world. In his conclusion, he writes, “when you show Americans the poor and the hungry – when you connect with them and educate them and they see the problems themselves – they don’t turn their backs. They want to help. They respond. We are a compassionate people, a giving people. We care.”

In that spirit of compassion, I would ask my colleagues in Congress to continue to support the FY2006 emergency supplemental appropriation of \$350 million for food aid. While encouraging other international donors to respond in a likewise generous manner, we must continue to help, to respond, to show that we care.

It is my hope and expectation that with this hearing today, we may further educate ourselves, our colleagues in Congress and the American people about the poor and the hungry, and we may respond with the compassion that they so desperately need.